DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 309 RC 018 190

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TITLE Educational Placements for Graduates of Preschool Programs for Students with Developmental Disabilities: A Rural-Urban Comparison.
PUB DATE Mar 90
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Rural Education Symposium of the American Council on Rural Special Education and the National Rural and Small Schools Consortium (Tucson, AZ, March 18-22, 1990).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Statistical Data (110) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Developmental Disabilities; *Early Childhood Education; *Mainstreaming; *Rural Urban Differences; *Special Education; *Student Placement
IDENTIFIERS *New Mexico; Washington

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the first educational placement and current placement for 1068 New Mexico students who graduated from special education preschool programs, 1987-1989. All subjects met eligibility criteria for the developmentally disabled and were divided evenly between rural and urban districts. With regard to initial placements, 9% of subjects graduated to regular classroom settings, 40% graduated to regular education with some support, and 51% graduated to self-contained special education classrooms. For current placements, 11% were in regular classrooms with no support, 35% were in regular classrooms with some support, and 54% were in self-contained special education classrooms. Stability of initial placement was 84%. These results are similar to those of a 1988 Washington study. Comparison of initial placements in rural and urban districts found that 43% of rural students graduated to regular classrooms with some support, compared to 32% of urban students, while 36% of rural students graduated to self-contained special education classrooms, compared to 59% of urban students. One percent of urban students and 11% of rural students graduated to unspecified ("other") placements. This paper contains seven data tables and three figures. (SV)

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RC018190

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Educational Placements for Graduates of Preschool Programs for Students with Developmental Disabilities: A Rural-Urban Comparison

With the passage of Public Law 99-457 more children are being served in public special education preschool programs. Where are these children going upon graduation? Are they remaining in special education or moving into regular education? These are important questions for teachers and school personnel to be asking. If a child has a moderate or severe disability, long term special education may be needed. But, for a child who has a mild handicap, it is hoped that he/she can move into regular education.

While special education researchers have presented evidence of the efficacy of early intervention programs for young children with handicaps, few studies have addressed the issue of post-preschool placements. Edgar, Gaetz and Maddox (1984) studied post-preschool educational placements of 2,021 public special education preschool graduates from 22 districts in two states. Table 1 summarizes the results for Study 1 (Colorado, AY 1981-1982) and Study 2 (Washington, AY 1982-1983). Edgar (1988) expressed the following two major concerns regarding these data: (a) while 31% of the Colorado graduates were placed in regular education classrooms with no support, only 16% of the Washington graduates were found in such placements. And (b), substantial differences were noted for subgroup populations (e.g., 41% of the students with mild/moderate handicaps were placed in regular classrooms in Colorado; 23% were so placed in Washington). In response to the discrepant findings, Edgar (1988) proposed further longitudinal study in the state of Washington and encouraged agencies in other states to follow-up their graduates.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the educational placements for preschool graduates of public special education preschool programs in the state of New Mexico, and to compare data with existing data from Washington. The studies reported herein were concerned with four major questions: What is the first educational placement for preschool graduates? What is their current placement? How stable are these placements over time? And, how do placements for preschool graduates compare between urban and rural districts?

Table 1

Current Placement Status of Colorado and Washington Students

Current Placement Status of Colorado Students
1981 - 1982
(N = 1,347)

Placement	Percentage
Regular Education (no special education services)	31.4
Regular Education with Support (consultant, itinerant, resource room)	37.1
Special Education Placement	31.5

Current Placement Status of Washington Students
1982 - 1983
(N = 674)

Placement	Percentage
Regular Education (no special education services)	16
Regular Education with Support (consultant, itinerant, resource room)	19
Special Education Placement	65

Method

Subjects and Setting

The New Mexico subjects include all 1068 children who graduated from special education preschool programs in 75 school districts during the 1986-1987 (the first year of programming for four-year-olds in New Mexico), 1987-1988, and 1988-1989 school years. All 18 independent school districts and 10 regional center cooperatives were requested to participate. Nine of 10 (90%) regional center cooperatives and 17 out of 18 (94%) independent school districts agreed to participate, for a total of 85% district participation (see Figure 1). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1980), New Mexico is the eighth lowest state in population density.

All subjects met eligibility criteria for developmentally disabled in the state of New Mexico and were between the ages of three and five. The children were considered graduates when they were placed out of preschool or reached the age of five by September 1st of a given school year. Table 2 contains demographic information on the subjects.

Table 2

Gender and Ethnicity of New Mexico Preschool Graduates

Gender	Percentage
Male	65%
Female	35%

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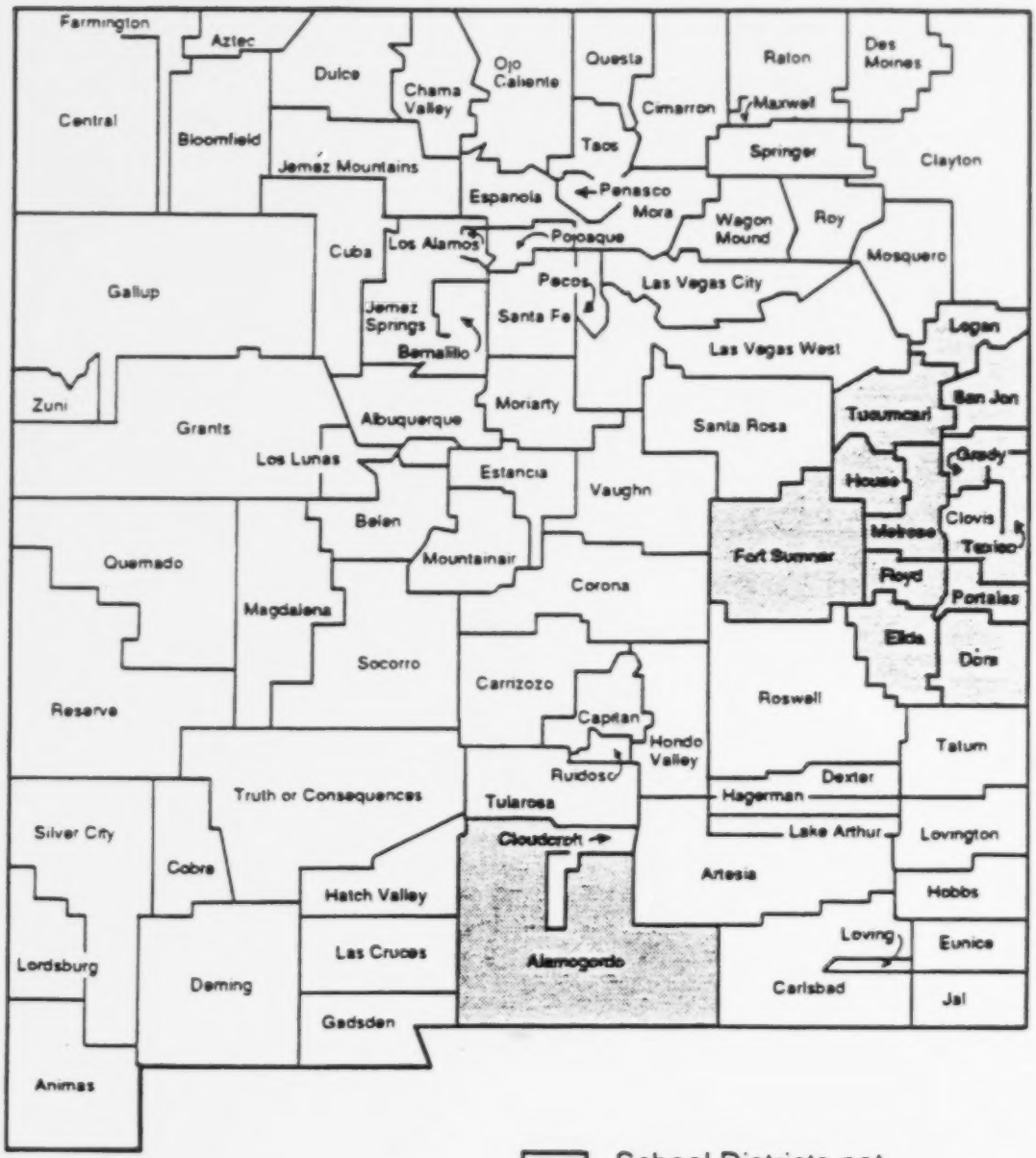
Ethnicity	Percentage
Caucasian	48%
Black	3%
Hispanic	39%
Asian	1%
Native American	10%

Figure 1

School District Map of New Mexico



Procedures

A data collector from each independent school district or regional center cooperative recorded the data on a protocol adapted from the Early Childhood Follow Along Study protocol used in the Washington studies. The data collectors were school personnel who had been or were presently involved with the district's early childhood program. Four workshops were conducted throughout the state in order to train the data collectors. They received instruction in the use of the form and were instructed to call the project office if any clarification was needed during data collection.

For each graduate, the data collector recorded demographic data, current handicapping condition, initial educational placement and current educational placement. Initial and current placement data were recorded for 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 graduates. Only initial placement data were collected for 1988-1989 graduates.

Results

Initial Placements

Table 3 describes initial placements for 580 Washington preschool graduates in 1984, 1985, and 1986 (Study 3). After eliminating unknowns (i.e., those who had moved, deceased, unknown placement), 75 (14%) of the Washington graduates were initially placed in full-time regular classrooms upon graduation from preschool, 22% placed in regular education with some support and 64% placed in self-contained classrooms.

Initial placements for New Mexico graduates (Study 4) are described in Table 4. Data are presented for 1068 graduates from preschool programs in 75 of 88 (85%) participating school districts (see Figure 1). After eliminating unknowns, 9% of the graduates were placed in regular classroom settings, 40% in regular education with some support and 51% in traditional (i.e., self-contained) classrooms.

Current Placements

As indicated in Table 5, 11% of the New Mexico graduates are currently in regular classroom settings with no support services. Thirty-five percent are in regular education classrooms with some support (e.g., a resource room). Fifty-four percent of the New Mexico graduates are currently found in self-contained classrooms. These data

are further described in Figure 2 and Table 6. Table 6 indicates current placements of New Mexico graduates by handicapping condition. As shown, the two larger categories of graduates currently placed in special education are communication disordered (CD) and multiply impaired (MI). While most CD graduates are currently placed in A-level programs (regular classroom with itinerant support), most MI children are currently placed in self-contained (D-level) programs. D-level programs are the most frequent placements for graduates. The most infrequent placement for graduates is C-level (special education classroom with some integration).

Table 5

Current Placement Status of New Mexico Students

Placement	Percentage
Regular Education (no special education services)	11
Regular Education with Support (consultant, itinerant, resource room)	35
Special Education Placement	54

Stability of Placements

Stability of placements were examined in three of the studies. In the original Washington study (Edgar, et al., 1984) (Study 2), 87% of the students placed in regular education remained in regular education across time. Of those placed in self-contained classrooms, 91% remained. Seventy-four percent of the children placed in regular education with support stayed in this type of placement. In the follow-up Washington study (Edgar, et al., 1988) (Study 3), 12 (16%) left regular education after one year, 11 (10%) moved from regular education with support and 12 (4%) left self-contained settings. In the most recent study (New Mexico), 84% of the children placed during the 1986-1987 academic year remained in the original type of placement in AY 1988. Of those placed in regular education with no support, 95% remained. Eighty-five percent of those placed in regular education with support stayed over time as did 97% of those placed in self-contained classrooms.

Table 3

First Placement by Preschool Handicap for Each Cohort
(Washington)

Category	Graduating Cohort			
	1984	1985	1986	Total
Mild MH				
Reg	9	6	5	20(13%)
Reg S	1	4	12	17(11%)
Sp	39	28	45	112(75%)
Other	4	3	13	20(12%)
Total	53	41	75	169(30%)
Mildly Handicapped (BD, CD, LD)				
Reg	16	16	13	45(21%)
Reg S	5	15	50	70(32%)
Sp	38	22	41	101(47%)
Other	4	3	12	19(08%)
Total	63	56	116	235(40%)
Severely Handicapped				
Reg	7	2	1	10(06%)
Reg S	10	7	9	26(16%)
Sp	29	49	45	123(77%)
Other	6	3	8	17(10%)
Total	52	61	63	176(30%)
Total	168	158	254	580

Note. Reg = Regular education placement; Reg S = Regular education with support; Sp = Special education placement.

Table 4

First Placement by Preschool Handicap for Each Cohort
(New Mexico)

Category	Graduating Cohort			
	1987	1988	1989	Total
Mild MH				
Reg	0	0	1	1(01%)
Reg S	1	6	2	9(12%)
Sp	18	20	26	64(86%)
Other	2	1	1	4(05%)
Total	21	27	30	78(08%)
Mildly Handicapped (BD, CD, LD)				
Reg	16	19	32	67(13%)
Reg S	74	104	131	309(59%)
Sp	34	46	67	147(28%)
Other	12	15	12	39(07%)
Total	136	184	242	562(54%)
Severely Handicapped				
Reg	10	4	6	20(05%)
Reg S	15	25	32	72(19%)
Sp	75	103	106	284(76%)
Other	7	8	6	21(05%)
Total	107	140	150	397(38%)
Total	264	351	422	1037

Note. Reg = Regular education placement; Reg S = Regular education with support; Sp = Special education placement.

Figure 2

Current Placements for 1989

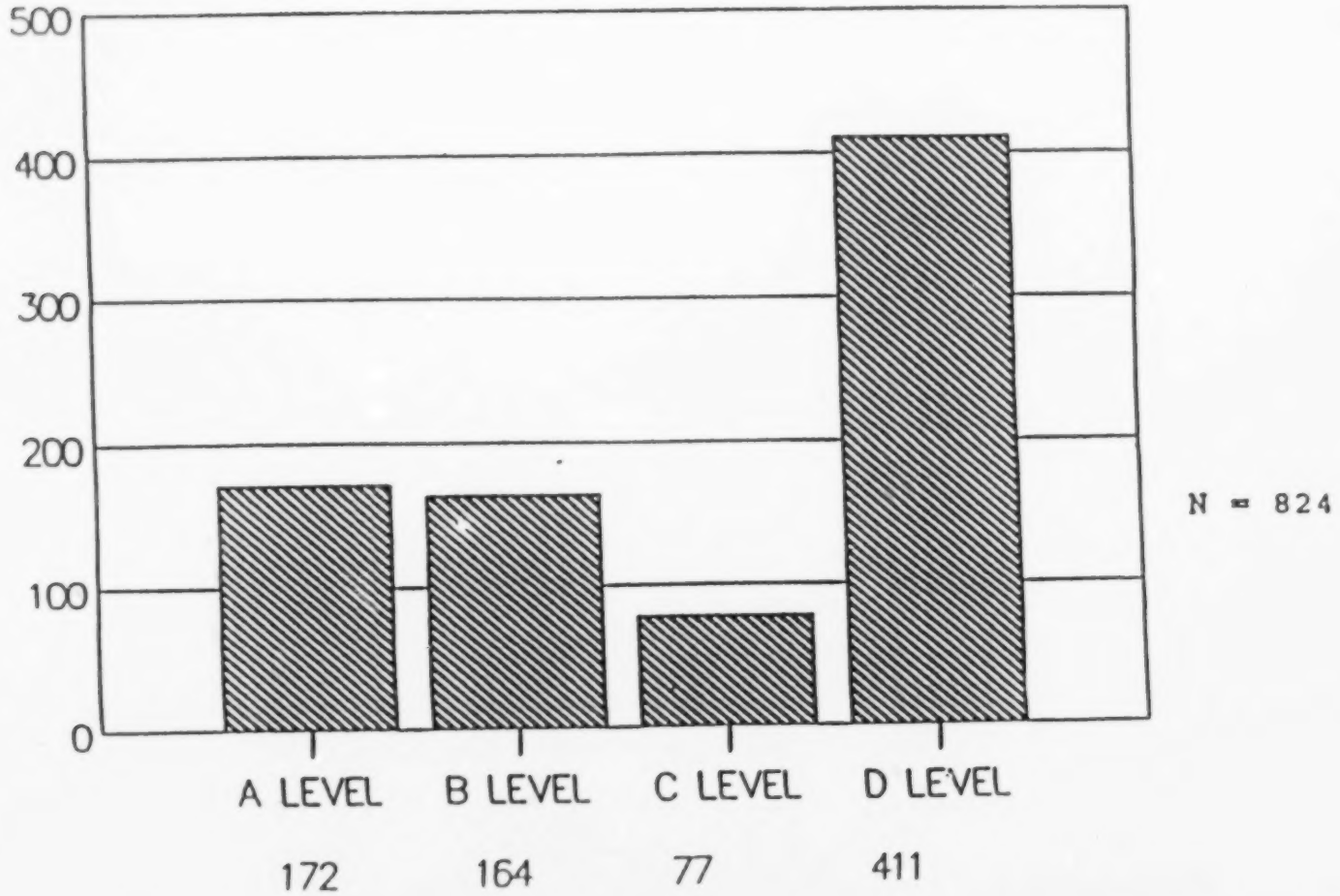


Table 6

Current Placement of Students by Handicapping Condition
(New Mexico)

Handicapping Condition	Level of Special Education Services			
	A Level	B Level	C Level	D Level
Behaviorally Disordered	1	0	4	11
Communication Disordered	147	136	34	117
Hearing Impaired	3	3	1	12
Learning Disabled	1	6	8	2
Mentally Handicapped Mild	2	1	16	57
Mentally Handicapped Moderate	0	1	0	35
Mentally Handicapped Severe/Profound	0	0	0	15
Multiply Impaired	0	4	4	108
Physically Impaired	17	12	7	45
Visually Impaired	1	1	3	9
Total	172	164	77	411

Rural vs Urban Placements

The U.S. Bureau of Census (1980) defines Census Nonmetropolitan as "all farms, open countrysides and places of less than 50,000 residents outside SMSAs". Eighty (91%) of New Mexico school districts serve nonmetropolitan school districts as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau (see Figure 3).

Table 7 describes placements of preschool graduates within rural-urban districts. In urban areas the data indicate a total of 309 (59%) graduates were placed in self-contained classrooms, 32% in regular education with some support and 8% in full-time regular classrooms. In rural settings, the largest percentage of graduates (43%) were placed in regular education with some support. Thirty-six of the graduates placed in self-contained classrooms and 9% in full-time regular education.

Discussion

This study examined initial placements, current placements, stability of placements, and compared rural and urban placements for graduates of public special education preschool programs in New Mexico. Major findings for initial placements were that 9% graduated to regular classroom settings; 40% to regular education with some support; and 51% to self-contained classrooms. For current placements, 11% are in regular classroom settings with no support; 35% in regular education classrooms within some support; and 54% in self-contained classrooms.

With regard to stability of placement, stability of initial placement was 84%. Very little movement occurred between the various placement options.

Major findings for rural-urban districts were that 59% of the graduates in urban districts were placed in self-contained classrooms, while 36% of graduates in rural districts were placed in self-contained classrooms. Forty-three percent of preschool graduates in rural areas were placed in regular education with some support, while in urban districts 32% of the graduates were placed in regular education with support. In urban districts 8% of the graduates were placed in regular education, while 9% of graduates were placed in regular education in rural districts.

Results of this study appear consistent with the Washington follow-up studies conducted by Edgar, et al.

Figure 3

School District Map of New Mexico

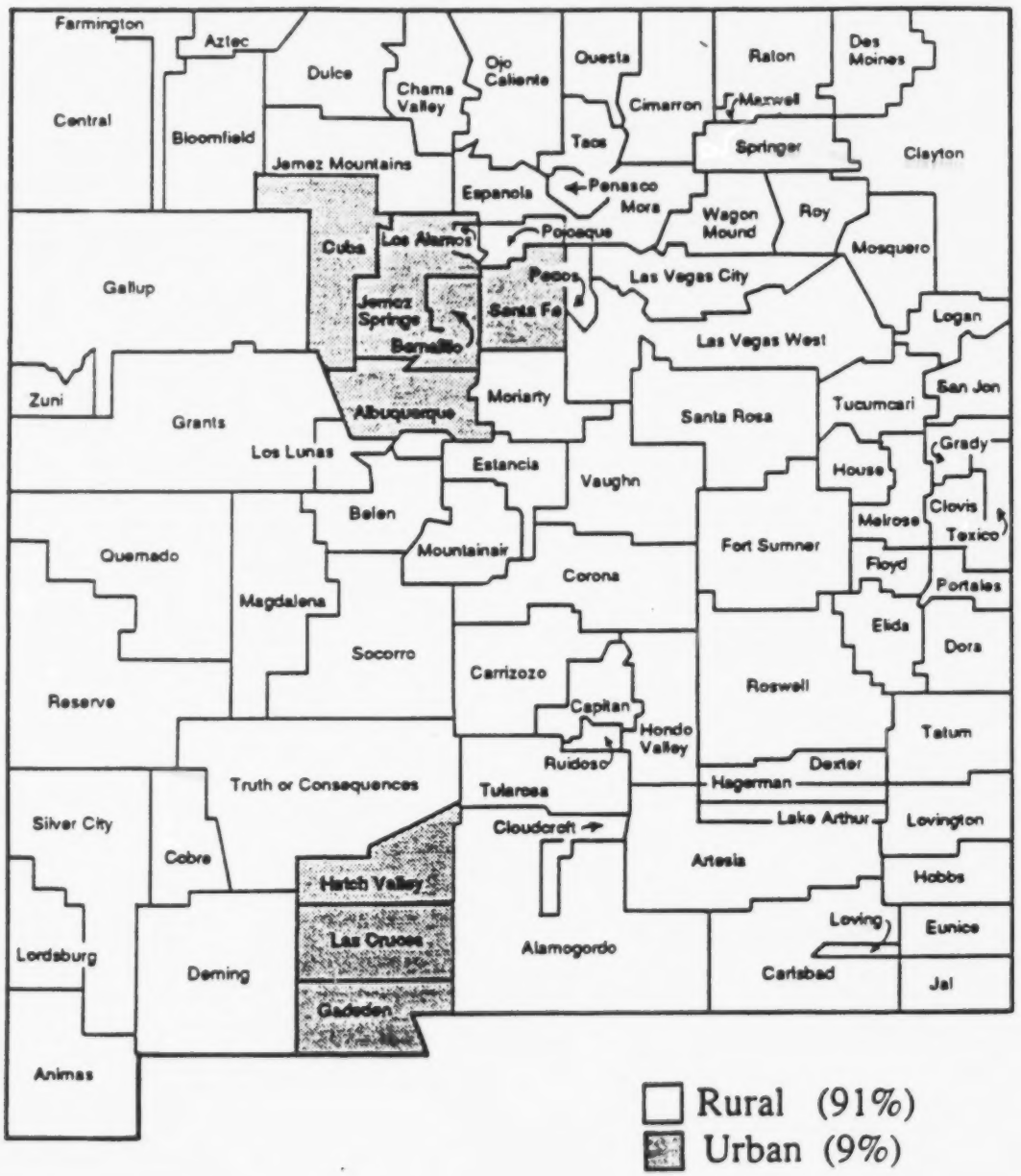


Table 7

First Placement for Total Group of Preschool Graduates by Rural-Urban Districts

Category	Rural	Urban	Total
Mild MH			
Reg	0 (0%)	1 (03%)	1
Reg S	7 (18%)	2 (05%)	9
Sp	28 (72%)	36 (92%)	64
Other	4 (10%)	0 (0%)	4
Total	39 (08%)	39 (07%)	78
Mildly Handicapped (BD, CD, LD)			
Reg	43 (14%)	24 (09%)	67
Reg S	175 (57%)	134 (53%)	309
Sp	52 (17%)	95 (37%)	147
Other	38 (12%)	1 (01%)	39
Total	308 (60%)	254 (49%)	562
Severely Handicapped			
Reg	3 (02%)	17 (07%)	20
Reg S	41 (24%)	31 (14%)	72
Sp	106 (63%)	178 (78%)	284
Other	18 (11%)	3 (01%)	21
Total	168 (32%)	229 (44%)	397
Total	515(49.7%)	522(50.3%)	1037

Note. Reg = Regular education placement; Reg S = Regular education with support; Sp = Special education placement.

(1988). In Washington, 14% of the graduates were initially placed in regular education, 22% placed in placed in regular education with some support and 64% placed in self-contained settings. Taken together placements appeared to be very stable in the states of Washington and New Mexico with stability ranging from 75% to 100%. The Washington studies did not examine the rural-urban placements.

We were very impressed with proportion (478 of 913) of students who graduated to a regular education setting or to regular education setting or to regular education with some support (e.g., resource room). This seems positive because a) the preschool programs seem to have prevented special education for many children and, b) given our stability findings to date, they may tend to remain in regular education.

Our work has indicated to use the need for additional analysis with extant data and the need to continue to follow the graduates. Further analyses would include examining the number of students who switch categories, achievement scores in the elementary grades, examining predictors of success in kindergarten and examining differences between rural and urban placements.

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